

Department of Human Services

Articles in Today's Clips Thursday, August 23, 2007

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Prepared by the
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State health standards for kids upheld in settlement

August 23, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The state and several child advocacy groups have reached a settlement in an eight-year-old federal lawsuit against the state Department of Community Health that will increase reimbursement rates to doctors and dentists who treat poor children and expand access to the Medicaid program.

The settlement, approved last week by U.S. District Judge Robert Cleland, would preserve improvements already put in place by the department, Jennifer Clarke, executive director of the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia, said Wednesday. Clarke's organization sued the state in 1999 with other parent and medical groups.

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"We welcome this settlement as an opportunity to improve the delivery of medical and dental care to the more than 1 million children in the state enrolled in Medicaid," said department Director Janet Olszewski. Only a quarter of those children receive preventive dental care.

Clarke said the settlement guarantees that a Medicaid program expanding dental services for poor children to 59 Michigan counties -- up from 22 -- continues. The settlement also locks into place a reimbursement increase to 47% of the normal cost of the services doctors render unto poor children, Clarke said.

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The 1 million children who rely on state-funded health insurance are expected to get more routine checkups and screenings for vision, hearing and dental problems following the settlement of an eight-year-old federal class action lawsuit against Michigan.

Federal law requires states to provide preventive health services to Medicaid recipients under 21 years old. But thousands of Michigan children went without that care for years because the state reimbursement rates for providers were so low that many no longer accepted the health insurance, according to the suit filed in 1999 by Westside Mothers, a Detroit welfare rights organization.

The settlement, approved last week, locks in for three years reimbursement rates that the state increased in October. For example, providers who treated new patients under 1 years old used to be reimbursed \$58.99. They now get \$86.72, a 47 percent increase.

The settlement also locks in rates for Healthy Kids Dental, a program available in 59 mostly rural counties, and requires more outreach efforts and more detailed reporting on services for children on Medicaid, which serves families living at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty level.

Children in a family of four in a household that earns \$27,878 or less in 2007 would qualify for Medicaid.

Selma Goode, coordinator of Westside Mothers, called the settlement "weak," but better than nothing.

"The state government at this point is not willing to demand of doctors who are part of a Medicaid program that they live up to certain service levels," said Goode. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We see so many adults with problems. An inexpensive prevention would have prevented the severity of the illnesses they are suffering from."

In 1999, when the suit was filed, 88 percent of the 21,000 physicians in the Michigan Medical Association accepted Medicaid but that number plummeted to 65 percent in 2005.

Plaintiffs in the suit argued that failure to provide preventive services needlessly disrupts children's development and stymies their long-term potential.

"We welcome this settlement as an opportunity to improve the delivery of medical and dental care to the more than 1 million children in the state enrolled in Medicaid," said Janet Olszewski, Michigan Department of Community Health Director, in a statement.

Among the children who went without care is 2-year-old Kamya Crane, who was born with a club foot. Hospital doctors told Crane's mother, Zina, to follow up with an orthopedic surgeon but the doctor they referred her to did not accept her Medicaid insurance.

It took the Detroit resident two weeks to find an orthopedic specialist who accepted Medicaid. But by that time, the damage was done.

The specialist told her the infant's foot should have gone into a brace immediately after birth. Though the orthopedist tried to correct Kamya's foot with a cast, he had to resort to surgery. The toddler now has to wear a brace and special shoes when she sleeps. She may have to undergo more surgeries, forgo sports and could face early-onset arthritis.

"I'm angry," said Zina Crane. "I don't feel she was treated properly."

The settlement also will require the state to collect and give advocates more detailed information regarding the number of providers that accept Medicaid, wait times to get appointments and how far they have to travel to get services.

That way, advocates say, they will have real data they will use to persuade policy makers to address the systematic problems.

"Everyone agrees if you give children health and dental care, it's going to save a lot of money in the long run," said Jennifer R. Clarke, an attorney with the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia and lead attorney for advocacy groups that were also plaintiffs in the suit.

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IN OUR OPINION

SCHIP decision will hurt children

August 23, 2007

The State Children's Health Insurance Program is not the ideal way to provide health care coverage for more kids in this country.

Maybe there's a market-based solution. Maybe a different kind of government program would work better. Or, dare to dream, there could be an as-yet un-proposed miracle solution out there.

Advertisement

But that's all theoretical, while SCHIP is real, in place, and in every participating state, has delivered for huge swaths of uninsured families.

So it would be nice if the Bush administration, rather than trying to undermine the program's expansion while crowing about the need for unspecified alternatives, was instead working seriously with states to make SCHIP more effective. As it is, the White House is allowing its philosophical objections to keep needy children from being able to see a doctor.

Public policy couldn't get any more shortsighted, or cruel.

Last week, the administration effectively dashed the hopes of several states that were planning to expand their SCHIP programs.

A federal Medicaid administrator said any state that wants to expand eligibility beyond families below 250% of the federal poverty level (about \$20,000 a year) would have to meet participation standards that no state has ever come close to. The idea, according to a federal Medicaid administrator, is to keep SCHIP from acting as a substitute for families that can afford private coverage.

Again, in theory, that's not a ridiculous stance to take. People who can afford insurance *should* buy it, and not rely on the government.

But as a practical matter, affordability means something different in, say, New York than it does in Michigan. It means one thing in California, and another in Idaho.

So several states with relatively high costs of living have proposed raising their SCHIP eligibility to include families with incomes as much as four times the federal poverty level, or about \$86,000.

Sounds high, but anyone who has ever tried to live in California or New York or New Jersey on that kind of cash can tell you that a family of four in that income range would, indeed, have a terrible time affording \$12,000 to \$15,000 in yearly health insurance premiums.

The theory that SCHIP would be a substitute for private coverage for these families wilts in the light of practical reality.

In Michigan, where the budget crunch has everyone talking about reductions instead of expansions, the Bush administration's policy will have no direct effect. But nationwide, in the states that proposed broadening SCHIP, the result of the decision will be palpable. It will mean more uninsured children -- period.

Congressional Democrats could, and should, override the policy. States should continue to experiment with ways to help families that can't afford insurance.

But the most important change, an administration that understands the dire need to get insurance for more people, and children in particular, is further off -- say, January 2009.

Find this article at:

<http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070823/OPINION01/708230366/1068/OPINION>

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Children need health coverage

Thursday, August 23, 2007

Editor, The Saginaw News:

No one in America, and certainly not our children, should suffer because they are uninsured. In Michigan, more than 155,000 kids are without health coverage, putting their health and their future at risk.

President Bush, Gov. Granholm, presidential candidates and members of Congress are all discussing how to extend health coverage to uninsured children by reauthorizing the State Children's Health Insurance Program -- SCHIP -- commonly know as MICHild in Michigan.

The governor knows and appreciates the importance of children's health coverage. Recently, she spoke at a rally in Detroit supporting the State Children's Health Insurance Program. At the event, she urged congressional representatives and the White House to take action to reauthorize the program and expand its funding.

This program provides health coverage through employers or for those who cannot afford the coverage they are offered. We know the MICHild works. Because of these SCHIP programs in every state, millions of kids nationwide can see doctors when they are ill, have access to medications, get regular check-ups and are hospitalized if necessary.

As a community, we cannot stand by while this crucial safety net is at risk of being pulled out from under thousands of Michigan families. I urge Michigan's federal lawmakers to support reauthorizing the SCHIP program and provide it with the necessary funds to continue its success.

If our leaders don't reauthorize and fund SCHIP appropriately, we are jeopardizing one of this nation's most important assets -- the health and future of our children.

Lester Heyboer, Jr.

president and CEO

HealthSource Saginaw, Inc.

Saginaw Township

Michigan legislators support children's health-care bill

Port Huron Times Herald

August 23, 2007

The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed a bill that takes major steps toward fixing our health care system for Michigan residents and all Americans. The bill, called the Children's Health and Medicare Protection Act, is a package of improvements to a health care system nearly everyone agrees could use some changes.

The CHAMP Act makes some long-overdue improvements to the Medicare program. The bill expands coverage and eliminates fees for preventive health care, such as prostate and colorectal cancer screening tests. If we can encourage more cost-effective preventive health care, we can begin to tackle who need "sick care."

Equally important as keeping people healthy is making sure those who need to see a doctor can. Importantly, the legislation ensures people in Medicare will continue to have access to their doctors. It prevents a significant cut in Medicare physician reimbursements which would have jeopardized the number of Medicare doctors who remain in the program.

Perhaps best of all, this will not be financed on the backs of people in Medicare with premium increases as it has been in the past. Doctors stay in the program and the people who rely on them can afford to keep seeing their doctors.

It's good for Medicare and good for people in Medicare.

These changes are paid for largely by reducing excess payments to health insurance companies that offer private plans in Medicare. According to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office, Medicare pays private insurers an extra \$100 per month per person than traditional Medicare.

People in traditional Medicare subsidize these extra payments to insurance companies through higher premiums. By reducing these excess payments we can afford improvements for everyone in Medicare.

No less important, with these changes and an increase in the tobacco tax, we can provide more uninsured kids with the health care they need. We can reauthorize and strengthen the State Children's Health Insurance Program (- a smart and affordable way to reduce the number of uninsured people in this country, starting with our most vulnerable kids. And paying for children's health coverage with a tobacco tax will help improve the health of the entire country by reducing smoking at all ages.

AARP was proud to see strong support for CHAMP from Michigan's House delegation, including: John Conyers, John Dingell, Dale Kildee, Carolyn Kilpatrick, Sander Levin and Bart Stupak. We applaud these lawmakers for choosing kids and older Americans, rather than bending to the insurance and tobacco lobbies. They have taken a strong step toward a better health care system, and we will continue to push Congress to put a final bill on the President's desk.

We thank all those who voted for CHAMP on behalf of the older Americans we represent, and we thank them on behalf of their children and grandchildren who have a better chance to grow up and be healthier adults.

Jennie Chin Hansen is the national president-elect of AARP.

ClickOnDetroit.com

Man Accused Of Biting Baby

POSTED: 11:35 am EDT August 23, 2007
UPDATED: 12:44 pm EDT August 23, 2007

BROWNSTOWN TOWNSHIP, Mich. -- A search is under way for a Brownstown Township man accused of biting his 5-month-old daughter.

Earlier in the month, the baby's mother said she discovered teeth indentations and bruises on her daughter's upper arms and cheeks.



The mother told police the baby's father, Juvante Beard, sent her a text message warning her that she wasn't going to like what she saw, police said.

Brownstown Township police said Beard has a history of violent behavior, including assaulting a police officer.

Beard remains at large.

Anyone with any information is asked to call the Brownstown Township Police Department.

RELATED TO STORY



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Mom gets probation

Thursday, August 23, 2007

GRAND RAPIDS -- A Sand Lake mother who left her twins and infant son in a running pickup for hours after she went inside a Lowell store was sentenced Wednesday to two years on probation. Kent County Circuit Court Judge George Buth also ordered Elizabeth Dillon, 29, to pay a \$300 fine. Dillon admitted she was in a saddlemaker's store when she left her 6-year-old twins and 22-month-old son in a truck for more than three hours Jan. 9. She admitted the neglect during her guilty plea to felony child abuse. Prosecutors agreed to recommend no jail time.

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Teen admits to rape

Thursday, August 23, 2007

By Steven Hepker

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A Jackson teen admitted Wednesday he raped a girl at gunpoint on Nov. 9 near Loomis Park.

Karon Reynolds, 17, told Circuit Judge John McBain he put a BB gun to the 17-year-old victim's head and forced her to have sex.

Reynolds, under questioning by defense attorney Andrew Kirkpatrick, pleaded guilty to first-degree criminal sexual conduct. Prosecutors will drop a charge of armed robbery in exchange for the plea.

McBain could sentence him to up to life in prison on Oct. 3.

Reynolds was 16 when he was arrested and charged with the crime. He will remain in the Jackson County Youth Center until he is sent to prison.

The victim testified at a preliminary hearing in May she was at the park that night with her boyfriend and two other teenage boys when Reynolds approached them. She said he stole her purse and herded the four teens into a garage on Edgewood Street.

Reynolds then forced her to strip and made the boys remove their shoes and lie face-down in a corner of the garage, they testified.

"He was trying to make us decide which one of us would take a bullet," the girl testified.

After the attack, the girl identified Reynolds from a school yearbook. She recognized him as a former classmate.

Until Wednesday, Reynolds had denied he was the rapist.

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Attorney's death shows reach of domestic violence

Thursday, August 23, 2007

By Theresa D. McClellan

The Grand Rapids Press

One man apparently didn't want the live-in relationship with his girlfriend, a popular teacher and coach, to end.

Another man killed his ex-wife the day before a court hearing dealing with his finances.

And in this area's latest incident of deadly violence, a man is charged with killing his wife, a prominent defense attorney, after, her relatives say, he tried to isolate her from her family with his jealous behavior.

While these three cases share the same tragic ending, the victims were not the stereotypical poverty-stricken women with no resources to escape.

They were successful career women, involved in their communities and, in at least two of the cases, felled by their mates.

Local domestic violence workers say this week's slaying of attorney Leontyne "Tina" Partee-Elder in her Grand Rapids home, last month's shooting death of Byron Center Public Schools teacher Cristi Curtis, and the 2003 murder of Mimi Bernard in her Cascade Township home, are deadly reminders that domestic violence is a complicated monster that can hit anywhere -- and at any income level.

"It's not who the victim is; it's what the perpetrator of violence chooses to do," said Jennifer Marcum, executive director of Safe Haven Ministries, a local domestic violence prevention organization.

"We have career women who see us on a weekly basis, women who are in beautiful homes and circumstances who are emotionally isolated and don't have free, open, safe, conversations with anyone," Marcum said. "They are building their confidence to leave bad situations."

Yet even women whose careers touch on this very type of violence can be caught in its snare.

Grand Rapids police say early Tuesday, Kevin Elder awakened his step-children, ages 9 and 11, and sent them to the basement before allegedly stabbing to death his estranged wife, criminal defense attorney Partee-Elder, in her home at 2416 Woodcliff Ave. SE.

Elder was arraigned Wednesday on a charge of open murder. He remains held without bond in the Kent County Jail.

Neighbors said they heard screams around the time Partee-Elder was attacked but did not call the police.

Experts say this type of hands-off response is common and continues to keep women in harm's way.

Tom Cottrell, vice-president of counseling for the YWCA, said the shame of domestic violence needs to end, and it's time the community creates an environment of safety.

That means employers, churches and the public need to get involved, creating protocols of safety at workplaces and safe stations at churches for children involved in these situations.

"It is important for women to know there is a lot of shame, embarrassment and fear in telling what is happening to them, and there is a natural reaction to figure out what you have done to cause this," Marcum said.

But rather than focusing on blame, the confidential domestic violence centers focus on getting women the strength and resources to leave the situations and not return. Locally, the YWCA, Safe Haven Ministries and Ottawa County's Center for Women in Transition provide counseling and help for women in these types of situations.

Leaving a rocky relationship can be dangerous for some women, and they need to make preparations. Abusers can threaten harm and give their victims reason to believe they will carry out those threats, Marcum said.

Partee-Elder knew the danger. She'd filed a restraining order against her estranged husband and even changed the locks on her door. But her nurturing nature also allowed her to let her husband back into her life, unable to leave the unemployed man out on the street, said her mother. Elder had worked for a telephone company but claimed disability following shoulder surgery in 2005 and lost his job.

Court records show Elder allegedly had physically and emotionally abused his wife in the past. He threw her "through a wall," she alleged, and threatened to kill her if she left him, saying "I will never let you go."

The day of Partee-Elder's death, both black AM radio stations in Grand Rapids dedicated their programming to the prominent attorney who made her living defending criminals.

Betty Partee, the victim's mother, said she was "extremely touched," by people who called into the stations with remembrances of her daughter from her law career, and her side career as a dancer and youth mentor.

"Inmates were calling into the station crying, saying how good she was and how she treated them with respect, or she took the time to learn their cases and give her best in defense. Other people said they remember seeing her dance in festivals. She was special and didn't even know it," her mother said.

For that reason, the family has created the Leontyne "Tina" Partee Scholarship Fund. Donations can be made at any Huntington Bank, and the family hopes it will be used to send local teens to college.

Touching on her loss, Betty Partee spoke of the suspect's impact on her daughter. "He was destroying her mentally the way he treated her. We didn't know the extent."

The couple married in Orlando, Fla., in August 2005. Partee-Elder defended Michael Jackson -- Elder's adult son from another relationship -- against charges he stabbed another man in a November 2004 street fight. Jackson was later convicted of a role in a robbery that ended with Otis Nelson shooting a Grand Rapids police officer.

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Muskegon Chronicle

Food pantries' shelves bare: It's 'a crisis'

Thursday, August 23, 2007

By Chad D. Lerch

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Yvonne Ramos wants to feed hungry residents in Muskegon County.

Eric Morgan has the same mission in Ottawa County.

But food supplies at their pantries have hit what they call an all-time low, and they don't want to turn people away.

"Last week, we literally had no food, we had nothing," said Ramos, the resource development coordinator at Muskegon's Love INC (In the Name of Christ), 2525 Hall.

"That's a crisis."

Morgan, executive director of Grand Haven's Love INC, 1106 Fulton, said he's making a plea for help. His organization, like almost all pantries, relies primarily on donations from individuals and families.

"We're to the point where we don't need cans of soup any more, we need cases of soup," he said. "We need cases of cereal just to make it -- because as soon as it comes in, it's gone."

Managers at area pantries say food donations usually dip this time of year, most likely because people are away on vacation.

Meanwhile, children who normally receive free lunches at school are home for the summer, so demand is up.

But this summer is worse than past years, food pantry officials said. They believe high gas prices, unemployment and state budget cuts are taking their toll.

People who used to go to state agencies for help are now being referred to local pantries like Love INC, Morgan said.

"We're serving people in our community who are on fixed incomes," Morgan said. "They really don't have a choice on gasoline. So something has got to give in their budget."

"There are a lot of people who are unemployed or under-employed," Morgan said. "They're taking whatever job they can, but it's a lot less than it was before."

Morgan said his pantry, on average, gives soup, vegetables, cereal and other food to an estimated 1,000 people in northwest Ottawa County.

That number has doubled this summer.

"It's devastating," Morgan said. "We're busier now than I've ever seen us before. The volume is so huge that we've extended our hours, just to help the folks in the community."

Morgan and Ramos said their agencies, which operate independently, are sending churches notices, asking their congregations for help.

One pastor asked Morgan for pictures of the bare shelves.

"He's going to blast the pictures up on the screen to share it with his church," Morgan said.

The agency doesn't give food directly to clients. Food comes into the pantry and it's distributed to partnering churches who give it away.

St. Patrick's Church in Grand Haven recently closed its pantry three hours early because the food was gone, officials said.

"It's just awful, it's never been this bad," said Love INC volunteer Dee Podehl. "It just makes you want to cry."

Meanwhile, the Second Harvest Gleaners Food Bank gives food away in Muskegon and Ottawa counties every month.

Morgan said some families start lining up at 4 a.m. for the 10 a.m. giveaways.

"It's just incredible," Morgan said. "All of our volunteers are up in arms about this."

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Food being collected for Portage Community Outreach Center

Thursday, August 23, 2007

By Tom Haroldson

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When they heard the food pantry shelves at the Portage Community Outreach Center were empty, the Wohlgemuth family knew something had to be done.

Debbie Wohlgemuth and her daughters, Krysette and Brittney, have been collecting nonperishable food, clothing, toiletries and other items needed by PCOC, and will continue to do so through Saturday.

The food and personal items drive is being done through the Portage Northern High School bands and color guard.

"We have 500 pounds so far," Debbie Wohlgemuth said Wednesday. "Our goal is \$1,500 pounds or more."

Anyone who wants to drop off food or other items that will be given to PCOC can go to Portage Northern between 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. Friday and Saturday. Volunteers will be collecting the goods in the rear of the high school, 1000 Idaho Ave.

"We'll take nonperishable foods, diapers, toiletries, shampoo, new clothes," Wohlgemuth said. "One lady even dropped off a bed."

For more information, call 323-8994.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Back-to-school fair helps children in need

Thursday, August 23, 2007

By Julie Mack

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There are an estimated 900 school-age children in Kalamazoo County who are homeless -- about 700 in Kalamazoo Public Schools alone.

They live in shelters, transitional housing, motels or in fragile arrangements with family or friends. The instability of their lives can make school attendance problematic.

How do they enroll without proof of residency? How can they stay at the same school as their housing arrangements change?

How does a family that lacks money for housing come up with enough for school supplies, sports equipment or school pictures?

Tracie Schoon knows those challenges only too well. She and her three children -- ages 10, 7 and 6 -- have been living at the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission since January.

Wednesday, the Schoons were among about 40 families at a back-to-school fair designed specifically for homeless children. Organized by Kalamazoo Public Schools, it included morning activities at the Kalamazoo Valley Museum, such as a scavenger hunt and arts and crafts, followed by lunch at the Gospel Mission, where every child received a backpack filled with school supplies and every family received a board game.

"My kids have really been looking forward to this," Schoon said. "They enjoy getting to know other children, and things like this make them feel like they're not alone."

Schoon also appreciated the backpacks. "When you're low-income, every little bit possible helps," she said. "I spent \$100 last year on school supplies."

Miah Jones, who is living in transitional housing with six children ages 6 to 15, brought her family to Wednesday's event.

"I really liked going to the museum," said her 12-year-old daughter, Shamaya. "It gives us something fun to do."

KPS officials said this is the first time they've organized a back-to-school event for homeless families. They paid for it through a federal grant designed to help the district expand services to homeless families, which is one of the lesser-known provisions of No Child Left Behind.

The federal legislation waives residency and immunization requirements for homeless children and pushes school systems to develop strategies that allow children to stay in the same school even as their families move.

"Our job is to make sure they can enroll in school and stay in school -- provide the continuity," said Karon Yeager, who as KPS Title I coordinator oversees services for homeless children.

Jon Behrens, KPS homeless liaison and the organizer of Wednesday's fair, said homeless kids have enough disruption in their lives without having bureaucratic tangles undermine their education. Behrens said the fair was an attempt both to get the children excited about the upcoming school year and inform

their parents about their rights and services available to them.

Marchelle Robinson, a Gospel Mission resident with children ages 1 and 8, said she enjoyed the fair as much as her daughter. "I was participating in museum things," Robinson said, "and I think I had as much fun as she did."

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Back-to-school pantries provide school supplies for families in need

By Sally Barber, Cadillac News

Backpacks, pens and markers are flying off store shelves in anticipation of the first day of the 2007-2008 school year. While many children are eagerly packing their bags, others worry whether they will have the supplies they need to make the grade.

Three area churches are working to make certain each student in Wexford and Osceola counties have the materials to succeed.

United Methodist Church in Cadillac will open its school supply pantry every Wednesday for the next several weeks. Backpacks, calculators, rulers, scissors, markers and other supplies are distributed to families demonstrating need.

"It allows them (students) to do their homework at home and bring those nice looking supplies to school so they have a sense of pride," said Barb Tatarchuk, programcoordinator.

Items are donated primarily by the congregation and supplemented by contributions from businesses and church funds.

"We have a box in the front of the church," Tatarchuk said. "I put a notice in the church bulletin in July and suddenly the box is filled."

The church has provided the service for the past eight years, according to Tatarchuk.

"The first year we had 90 children," she said. "Last year the number doubled. It's grown in terms of both need and the number of people learning about it."

In Osceola County, Augustana Lutheran Church in Tustin and Immanuel Lutheran Church in LeRoy also see student outreach programs growing.

"Between the school and food need, it seems everybody is in need of something since the gas prices went up," said Barb Hazlett, a member of Augustana's Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the group which runs the program.

Augustana Church operates a year-round school pantry for students. In addition to the pantry, they provide all LeRoy-Tustin Headstart children a schoolbag with supplies, send filled bags to OASIS in Cadillac for displaced children, and provide bags and supplies to Lutheran Social Services of Michigan. Each school bag is handmade by Sandy Goddard, a member of the Augustana congregation.

Immanuel Lutheran also provides bags to the Lutheran social service organization.

"We get a lot of referrals from Love INC," Hazlett said.

Although Osceola County residents may call the Augustana Church directly for assistance, Love INC. in Cadillac, a Christian clearinghouse for human services, screens applicants for both Augustana and the United Methodist churches.

Eligibility is based on income and expenses, according to Diane Wood, Love INC. director.

"The main thrust is now through the first couple of weeks of school," Wood said, emphasizing year-round aid is available.

"This started out with the belief it is a way for churches to reach out to families and give them a boost," she explained.

Families in need of assistance in Osceola County may call Barbara Hazlett at (231) 829-5483. Osceola and Wexford county residents may call Love INC. at (231) 779-1888.

Your Local Connection

Back-to-school spending

What families are expected to spend on back-to-school merchandise

- School supplies: \$94, up from \$86 a year ago

- Clothing and accessories: \$231
- Teen spending: pre-teens will chip in \$15 of their own money, teens will spend \$31
- Where families are shopping: office supply stores, 41 percent; drug stores, 17 percent; department stores, 54 percent; specialty stores, 31 percent
- Category of largest spending increase: electronics
- Total expected spending for families with school-age children: \$563

Source: National Retail Federation Consumer Intentions and Actions Survey

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State budget moving at snail-like pace

TIM MARTIN
Associated Press

LANSING — After a marathon session covering parts of Wednesday and today, it wasn't clear how much closer the Legislature had moved to resolving a looming budget crisis for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

The state House, led by Democrats, passed versions of budget bills that call for far more cash than state government will have available under its current cost and revenue setup.

▼ ADVERTISEMENT ▼



The state Senate, led by Republicans, passed budget bills for less money than recommended by Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

The Legislature has started slicing up next year's budget, but there's no agreement on how big a pie they're dealing with. It leaves unresolved the major issue in next year's plan: whether there will be a tax increase, what form it might take and how big it might be.

The state faces a projected deficit of at least \$1.6 billion in budgets covering schools, prisons, health care and a host of other programs.

"There's a lot to do," said Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop, a Republican from Rochester. "This is the first inning in a rather long game."

The Legislature is months behind the usual schedule for moving budget bills because Republicans and Democrats disagree over

whether taxes should be raised to help balance the budget.

House Democrats have introduced a wide range of proposals — including raising the income tax and slapping a sales tax on some types of services — but they haven't voted on any of the major proposals. Other revenue raising ideas include a higher tax on liquor and higher fees on phone service. Another proposal discussed this week would allow horse tracks to open casinos, but that would require a vote of Michigan citizens because of a 2004 constitutional amendment.

House Speaker Andy Dillon, a Democrat from Wayne County's Redford Township, made some proposals to Bishop this week. But neither camp has said what was in the latest mix of possible tax increases, spending cuts and structural changes to government. Dillon acknowledged the House is passing bills without specific revenue sources attached to them, but said it is part of the overall give-and-take necessary to make it come together at the end.

"We still have to have the process where we get budgets moving back and forth so we're done by Sept. 30," Dillon said. "I'm very comfortable with this. I think we're saying this is ideally what we'd hope to do in this environment. But if we have a revenue shortage, we're going to have to look at paring some of them back."

Senate Democrats criticized Republicans because their budgets — instead of proposing all the cuts — also tell the departments to find some savings on their own.

Senators also sparred over a GOP plan to privatize more of Michigan's **foster care, adoption and juvenile justice** systems and whether a new border crossing over the Detroit River should be public or private.

The House passed budget bills for K-12 schools late Wednesday. After long, behind-the-scenes debates about amendments and procedural challenges, the House narrowly approved versions of

budgets for community colleges and universities before ending voting at about 6:10 a.m. today.

Republicans said the delay involved a dispute about whether voting should be allowed on their amendments that would block schools from offering benefits to unmarried partners of employees and prevent illegal immigrants from getting tuition breaks. Democrats said that if Republicans were serious about those proposals, they should have made them earlier in the budget process.

When Democrats forced a final vote on the community college and higher education bills, they were shouted at by angry Republicans who wanted a chance to vote on their amendments. The GOP already has requested that the House reconsider its community college budget vote when it meets next week.

The House version of the K-12 bill would add a minimum of \$100 per pupil to school budgets, which is less than the \$178 proposed by Granholm. But the House version would boost funding for districts funded at relatively low levels and would boost money for schools in rural areas with higher busing costs so some districts would come out ahead. Overall, the House's school aid budget would be about \$13.3 billion — about 2.3 percent more than this year.

The House plan would split university funding into two separate bills. The first would cover the University of Michigan, Wayne State University and Michigan State University, the state's three large research and medical school universities. The other would cover the state's 12 smaller universities, a move that angers many of the smaller schools because they feel it sets a bad precedent for treating them differently.

The House plan would give all universities a base increase of 2.5 percent for next fiscal year, plus the repayment of a delayed payment from the current fiscal year. It also would provide another 2.5 percent increase — an extra \$36 million — based on the use of federal Pell grants and the type of degrees the universities award.

More weight would be given to schools with a high rate of math, science and engineering degrees and schools that do a lot of research.